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RUEHJI/AMCONSUL JEDDAH PRIORITY 8738
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001133

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LONDON FOR TSOU, PARIS FOR ZEYA
DEPT FOR NEA/ARP (WALKER, SHUKAN, JACHIM), INL, DRL
(HANFORD, BARKS-RUGGLES), CA/OCS/ACS/NESA (RICHER)

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [SOCI](#) [CASC](#) [KJUS](#) [SA](#)
SUBJECT: RELIGIOUS POLICE DETAINED FOR ALLEGED MURDER OF
SAUDI

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d).

11. (U) The Saudi press reported on May 27 that the religious police allegedly beat to death on May 23 a 28-year old Saudi, Sulaiman or Salman Al-Huraisi, who was detained for the possession/sale of alcohol. After various conflicting and incomplete media reports, the Riyadh Governorate subsequently issued a press statement confirming that the Commission for the Promotion of Virtue and the Prevention of Vice (CPVPV) -- also known as the religious police -- and regular police raided the deceased's house in accordance with the requisite authorization and regulations. The statement said the authorities apprehended everyone inside the house and confiscated 23 bottles of liquor, a 40-liter or 40-gallon barrel of liquor, 146 or 147 Captigon pills, a licensed Kalishnikov machine gun, a magazine of 70 bullets, 22 pistol bullets, two swords, and 2,587 Saudi Riyals (approximately USD 690) in cash. The statement confirmed that someone apprehended in the raid had died, and also said the deceased's father testified that his son died after having been beaten. The statement indicated that the that religious police had also been beaten when they entered the house, adding that all persons involved in the incident had been arrested for questioning, including members of the religious police and regular police.

12. (U) The deceased's brother, Ali Al-Huraisi, told the press that the religious police had forced entry into the house and exceeded their authority. He accused the religious police of violating his brother and family's human rights, saying they acted as judge, jury, and executioner. He claimed that the religious police treated his brother worse than a terrorism suspect, adding that the religious police's mission is only to detain suspects and turn them over to the regular police. He also accused the religious police of not showing proper respect to the people in the house, especially the women, pointing out that a six-month old infant was also in the house at the time of the incident. He confirmed that the religious police arrested everyone in the house, including the deceased's elderly father and the women. He claimed that the religious police beat his brother in the house and continued beating him at the Al-Oraija district detention center in Riyadh until he died. The deceased's father said that the religious police beat the handcuffed man even though he was already covered in blood.

13. (U) The SAG has confirmed that an official investigation into the cause of Al-Huraisi's death is underway, and the authorities are also investigating the possible abuse of authority. On May 29, the Saudi Gazette reported on another statement from the Riyadh Governorate that it had received a

letter from the CPVPV explaining the death of Al-Huraisi. The statement indicated that the regular police had detained eight religious police and the Interior Ministry had launched an investigation in response to complaints by the family of Al-Huraisi. An unconfirmed report stated that in addition to the eight religious police, two regular police were detained for questioning.

¶4. (U) CPVPV President Sheikh Ibrahim Al-Ghaith told the media on May 27 that the authorities were questioning several suspects from the Riyadh religious police regarding the alleged beating death. Al-Ghaith did not say how many religious police were under investigation, but said that if members of the religious police were proven guilty, they would be punished. He insisted that entry into the house had been in accordance with rules and regulations. Al-Ghaith expressed disappointment at local media coverage of the incident, calling it "an attempt to blow up mistakes by the CPVPV." He said the CPVPV welcomes constructive criticism and called on journalists to report "fairly, accurately, and completely." He denied that the CPVPV is media-hostile, claiming it cooperates with journalists.

¶5. (C) This incident occurred amidst growing criticism of the religious police. The May 2007 annual report by the National Society for Human Rights cited a number of human rights violations by the CPVPV, including forceful entry into homes, beatings, humiliations, confiscation of personal belongings, and unnecessary body searches. There have also been statements by various SAG officials regarding the CPVPV's roles and responsibilities that are sometimes inconsistent. For example, in March 2007, CPVPV President Al-Ghaith told the media that members of the religious police are not above the law; however, a 40-year old fatwa

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reportedly states that no member of the religious police may be tried in court. Although the CPVPV's authority was limited in 2006 by Minister of Interior Prince Naif, proposals to make the CPVPV report to the Interior Ministry have not been successful, so the CPVPV continues to report directly to the King.

COMMENT

¶6. (C) The authorities, including Al-Ghaith, have stated that appropriate action will be taken once the investigation into the cause of Al-Huraisi's death is completed and the facts of the case presented. However, this incident and the government's handling of it highlight two key trends. First, the very fact that such a controversial issue is being reported so broadly in the media is clearly reflective of the increasing openness of the press -- and the SAG's willingness to use the media as a forum for such discourse. Our local Saudi contacts tell us repeatedly that such controversial issues were never discussed publicly in the past. Secondly, the Al-Huraisi incident illustrates the overall polarizing nature of the religious police in contemporary Saudi society. Comments regarding this incident range from praise of the CPVPV as the defender of Islamic values to criticism of it as unaccountable, out-of-control, and abusive. While many Saudis question the role of the religious police, there are those who support their efforts -- even calling them "society's life preserver." It remains to be seen whether the SAG will leverage the Al-Huraisi incident to effect changes within the CPVPV, but given the increased discourse about its role, it is unlikely that this incident will pass without consequence. END COMMENT.
FRAKER